

critical digest

Vol. III No. 16

December 18, 1950

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Out of This World-Century, 12/12/50. Cole Porter musical featuring Charlotte Greenwood and William Eythe. Book by Dwight Taylor and Reginald Lawrence. Directed by Agnes de Mille, produced by Subber and Ayres.

Digests of Current Reviews--more on back page

The Cellar and the Well-ANTA Playhouse, 12/10/50. ANTA's second subscription play shown at 5:30 P.M., won the favor of just two daily reviewers. Hawkins, WT&S, and Women's Wear, found merit in Phillip Pruneau's script about life in South Chicago slums. They praised ANTA for fulfilling important function of introducing promising writers. Sheaffer, Eagle, believes young writer some day will write good play. While remainder panned script and production. Cast headed by Eda Heinemann, Dorothy Sands and Ann Dearing didn't merit much praise. McClain, Journal American, fears the future ANTA productions, if this is a sample of considered judgment. Most agreed production brought little prestige to ANTA, author or players.

Let's Make An Opera-Golden, 12/13/50. First night critics didn't take readily to singing in public, judging by majority of adverse criticisms filed against Benjamin Britten's work. Only Chapman, News, and Hawkins, WT&S, enjoyed the proceedings. Former recommended it to all who love theatre, latter suggested only those who enjoy performing should attend. Several were convinced the children might enjoy show more than parents. Atkinson, Times, didn't think much of audience participation features, but he did like the Britten music, and the fine singing of Rawn Spearman. Norman Del Mar, as conductor of audience and cast, won praise for portrayal and hard work. Others suggested that opera itself was worth while, but it took too much of the evening to arrive at it. Pollock, Compass, saw it as too tepid for New Yorkers.

Bless You All-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Majority of daily reviewers took title to heart in judging musical revue produced by Levin and Smith. They complimented fine teamwork of Jules Munshin, Mary McCarty, Pearl Baily and Valerie Bettis. Watts, Post, and McClain, Journal American, both enjoyed the show, but felt sketches by Arnold Auerbach and songs by Harold Rome could have been better. Dissenters included critics of Times, Compass, Newark News and Women's Wear. They praised sets by Oliver Smith and costumes by Miles White; but felt rest of show wasn't as glamorous. Chapman, News, suggested Director John C. Wilson could cut some of the songs and sketches. Most agreed that Valerie Bettis' dances and Jules Munshin's humor were high spots. Pollack, Compass, feared writers were trying to be satirical and innocuous all at once.

Editorial Pros and Cons

Typical of second cousin attitude of theatre managers toward playgoers is standard procedure used in announcing last minute cast changes. Instead of telling ticket buyer that leading player is ill, the manager holds the information until the lights are down and the house is filled. Then he informs the audience that Mr. Unknown will play the role of Mark Whoso. It isn't until the play is underway and the program can be checked, that the duped playgoer discovers that the advertised leading player is out.

News & Notes

T.S.Eliot turning down all movie offers for The Cocktail Party...Maude Adams living in Long Island convent near her old home...ANTA Ball postponed to January 15.

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- - - - - ' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance ' - - - - -

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. Ward Morehouse (WTAS, N.Y.Sun) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. World Telegram & Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

Affairs of State-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-8-9-15-18-19-27-30. Con: 14 votes. None: 13-17-21-23-28.

Arms and the Men-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-10-11-12-18-19-23-29. Con: 12 votes.

Bell, Book and Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 2-6-7-18-22.

Black Chiffon-48th St.Theatre, 9/27/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 2-3-14-22-27-29.

Call Me Madam-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 19-20-28-29. So-So: 3.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-9-13-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

The Country Girl-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 4-9-16-27-28-30.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 16-19-22-23-29. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

Guys and Dolls-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 28.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.

Hilda Crane-Coronet, 11/1/50. Pro: 13 votes. Con: 1-2-5-14-16-19-23-27-28-29-30.

Kiss Me Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29.

The Lady's Not For Burning-Royale, 11/8/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 3-5-12-29. So-So: 18-30.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Pardon Our French-Broadway, 10/5/50. Pro: 10-11-12-15-18. Con: 14 votes. So-So: 1-5-8-9.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 11 votes. Con: 1-2-12-16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.

The Relapse-Morosco, 11/22/50. Pro: 2-3-6-8-9-10-12-16. Con: 1-4-7.

Season in the Sun-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 10-12-24-28. So-So: 11.

Ring Round the Moon-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 3-8-9-15-22-23-27. So-So: 1-2.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

The Tower Beyond Tragedy-Biltmore, 11/26/50. Pro: 1-3-9-11-12-14-18-19-23-39. Con: 2-4-5-6-8-10-27.

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' Green Room Department '
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CRITICS & RATINGS... Though Variety has dropped its controversial critics ratings, Billboard is still rating the reviewers on their ability to pick hits. At the two-third season mark the trade journal discovers that Garland, Journal American picked six right and none wrong, before he became ill. Coleman, judged 15 right and one wrong, while Chapman, News, was at the bottom of the chart with seven wrong out of 14 guesses. Shows that reach over 100 performances are rated hits. Chapman and Morehouse, WTAS, both confessed regret that Variety poll had been ended, while Watts, Post, thinks that any system that causes reviewers to think about the box office, rather than merits of play, is wrong.

DULL AUDIENCES... First nighters are gold compared to subsequent audiences, deduces Sylvester, News, after attending four hit shows over a week end. At one comedy you could count three before any laugh followed the funny lines. The living theatre needs a million Katzenbergs.

THEATRE TIPS... Efficiency, courtesy and high morale of house staff were recommended as worthy of consideration for Council of Living Theatre's promotion campaign by Theatre News Weekly. Bored ticket taker, over zealous checkroom attendant and others are helping dim the glamour of theatre attending for the patron.

STILL HOPE... In spite of TV the living theatre will survive, comments TV critic Gross, News. He viewed Tickets Please both in the theatre and on TV. Nothing can compete with an original Broadway production with "live" performers.

YULETIDE GIFTS... Kilgallen, Journal American, had column full of presents for the celebrities. Included were -- a good American revue for Beatrice Lillie---an American history book for Christopher Fry---a book on how to overcome shyness for Jean Arthur---a full skirt for Katharine Hepburn---a shiny championship loving cup for Ethel Merman.

RETORTS TO CRITICS... President Truman's note to the Washington Post music critic is who panned daughter Margaret, reminded Winchell, Mirror, of some of the brass knuckle exchanges between critic and accused. Actually the review was "namby-pamby" when compared to some of the brass knuckle attacks.

TRYOUT ON TV... Ford TV Theatre's production of Zoe Akins Another Darling was first time that play being considered for legitimate theatre was pre-tested on TV. Producers hoped to raise money through tryout. Variety critic didn't see much hope for script, as either TV or theatre entertainment.

DEFENDING COUNCIL... Sawyer Falk's sharp letter against stated objectives of Council of Living Theatre was answered by Chairman Robert Sherwood via Times Drama Mailbag. Letter assured the Syracuse professor that Council's main purpose is to bring people back to theatre and vice versa. He asked Mr. Falk to state the "something revolutionary in concept that is needed to save the theatre".

RUNYON TICKETS... Coleman, Mirror, reminds playgoers who want to see the hits that tickets are available from Damon Runyon Memorial Cancer Fund. They are allotted on "best contribution" basis. Contact John Teeter at the Park Sheraton Hotel.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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W. Ward Marsh subbing for ill William McDermott, Cleveland Plain Dealer...NBC-TV to follow up Miss Liberty with Louisiana Purchase...Four Pittsburgh critics featured on WDTV Sunday "Sho-Biz-Quiz"...Donald Kirkley, Baltimore Sun, emcee on Baltimore's "Dinner at the Sheraton Belvedere" via WMAR-TV...Carol Channing return to Gentlemen Prefer Blondes heralded by display ads.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '
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LOUIS CALHERN...King Lear star detailed some suggestions to Wilson, Post, on exactly how the Shuberts can spend their money. Now that they are the richest people in the theatre why don't they endow an experimental theatre, or help a sick institution. The actor believes some kind of benevolence would be very becoming of them here and in the hereafter.

MICHAEL SMYTH...Plymouth Theatre ticket taker doubles as a Wells Fargo armored car guard, New Yorker reporter discovered. He has been with Wells Fargo for 15 years and with the Shuberts for 17 years. His main job at the theatre after the curtain goes up is handling crashers.

CLIFFORD ODETS...The Country Girl author admitted to Morehouse, WTAS, that the critics have the final say. But he still finds it astonishing and shocking that an author can work on a play for months and still not know if it is a hit or flop until he reads the notices. There is nothing as hostile as an audience who bought advance seats before the critics' panning.

THYRA SMITTER WINSLOW...Theatre editor of Gotham Guide, magazine for N.Y. hotel visitors, leads a busy life, MBS Sardis discovered. In addition to her theatre reviewing chores she writes a fiction story every other week for Hearst's Saturday Home Magazine, plus non fiction articles for many magazines. At present she is writing a fiction book and a book on dieting. To accomplish all this she sleeps but four hours a night.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Ring Round the Moon-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Diverse views expressed by two weekly reviewers on Fry translation of Anouilh "charade with music". Kerr, Commonweal, doubted if script was coherent enough to be termed a play. It seemed merely an excuse to have nice costumes. But George Jean Nathan thought the authors did a fine job with a light, clever script. He did think the play suffered from a variety of acting styles.

The Tower Beyond Tragedy-ANTA Playhouse, 11/26/50. Score four more weekly reviewers' approval, plus one "con" vote for ANTA's first offering. Time critic considered it merely an undynamic stage treatment of the Jeffers poem. Others praised Judith Anderson's electrifying performance. Gabriel, Cue, tabbed Marian Seldes as "Tomorrow's American Rachel". Trade paper critics enjoyed show, but doubted if it would be popular.

Guys and Dolls-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Bravos continue to be sounded for musical version of Runyon stories. Kerr, Commonweal, found it hard to convey exactly how much he enjoyed it. Director George S. Kaufman deserved most of the credit for a perfect evening, in his opinion. Gabriel, Cue, is positive Runyon would have loved it.

Bell, Book and Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Skillful jobs of direction and authorship of John van Druten, and acting of Lilli Palmer and Rex Harrison, were credited toward "pro" review from Brown, SRL. He especially enjoyed the way the author manages to give pleasure by the civilized quality of his thinking.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Shows that closed include The Golden State and The Relapse...Tower Beyond Tragedy moves to Biltmore following ANTA sponsored run...Mr. Roberts road company hunting weight lifters who can act via Times want ad...Lilli Palmer signed by Pond for daily WCBS-TV chatter show starting January 4...Emmett Deadman replaces Robert Pollock, Chicago Times critic...RCA invested \$50,000 in Make A Wish musicale.

